

*The Landscape Element in Thomas Rowlandson's Art*THE LANDSCAPE ELEMENT IN
THOMAS ROWLANDSON'S ART. BY
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MOST people look upon the work of Rowlandson as caricature pure and simple. It was a good deal more than this, and a careful study of it shows that its creator was not only a good draughtsman, but also an artist in the best sense of the word. It is quite true that he did a great many caricatures, but at the same time he was a painter with considerable and varied gifts. His achievements in caricature place him above his contemporaries Gilray, Bunbury, and others of his time. Moreover, his work is far more pictorial than theirs; indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Rowlandson was a true successor of Hogarth as a pictorial satirist. As an artist, his serious work, by its mastery of delicate tints, grace of line, and also its wonderful inventiveness in figure compositions and their settings, entitles him to a foremost place amongst English painters in water-colour.

He started his artistic career as a portrait painter, and exhibited both male and female portraits at the Royal Academy exhibitions from 1777 to 1781. According to the opinion of the best critics of his time, amongst whom were the painters Reynolds, West, and Lawrence, these portraits possessed great pictorial merit, and there is ample reason to believe that if Rowlandson had continued in this branch of painting he would undoubtedly have held his own—possibly more than his own—with his contemporaries. But the popular success that his drawings *Vauxhall Gardens*, *An Italian Family*, and *The Serpentine River* enjoyed, when they were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784, made the artist throw up his opportunities in the direction of portraiture as well as painting in oil, and henceforth devote all his time to caricature and water-colour drawings.

Rowlandson had not only an eye for character in men and women, but also for their surroundings, which are generally admirably hit off, whether they portray the interior of the mansion, the tavern, the street, the country lane, or field.



"LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES AND CATTLE"

WATER-COLOUR BY THOMAS ROWLANDSON

(In the collection of Edward Marsh, Esq., C.M.G.)

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